

## ULSTER UNIVERSITY

### REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 12C EQUINE MANAGEMENT, COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL ENTREPRISE (CAFRE), ENNISKILLEN CAMPUS

21 November 2019

**PRESENT:** Mrs Ursula Quinn, Senior Lecturer, School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Ulster University Business School, Ulster University (Chair)\*  
Mr Jerome Marley, Faculty Representative/Faculty Partnership Manager, Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster University  
Professor Meriel Moore-Colyer, Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange, Royal Agricultural University

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Ms D Troy, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

\* *Due to unforeseen circumstances, Mrs Quinn stepped in as Chair. The second external panel member was unfortunately also unable to attend.*

#### 1 BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The panel was convened to consider the following provision.

- FdSc Equine Management (with CertHE exit award) (FT)
- BSc Hons Equine Management (with CertHE and AB exit awards) (FT)

#### 2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. UK Quality Code's Benchmark Statements for Business and Management (2015), Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Food and Consumer Studies (2016) and Foundation degree Characteristics Statement (2015);
4. External Examiner reports for past two years;
5. Preliminary comments from Faculty Partnership Manager (CA4);
6. Preliminary comments from Panel members (CA7).

#### 3 TOUR OF RESOURCES

Prior to the meeting, the Panel undertook a tour and were very impressed with the excellent resources and facilities available at the Enniskillen campus to support delivery of the programmes.

#### 4 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

##### 4.1 Background and Rationale

The Senior Team provided some background information on CAFRE which sat within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The Enniskillen campus was one of three and specialised primarily on equine. The campus was unique in this respect

and it focused on the delivery of programmes to young people but also worked closely with industry and those already in the industry in relation to upskilling and knowledge transfer.

The College's higher education strategy going forward focused on widening access and supporting students to progress to their full potential, alongside meeting industry need. The focus on access and progression was underpinned by the Department's overall Knowledge Framework Strategy.

The link with Ulster University was long-standing partnership and a unique selling point of the equine programmes. The uniqueness of the provision was further enhanced and underpinned by the wide network of links that the College had developed with industry locally, regionally and internationally. Technology now played a significant role and this area had been enhanced and supported in the revised programmes with additional specialist resources now also in place.

The international aspects of the programmes also continued to be developed and students were now able to avail of additional opportunities to travel and exploit a range of global opportunities through the courses. Graduates were academically and vocationally competent and very much work ready. These enhancements set the courses apart from competitors.

#### 4.2 Demand

The Senior Team reported that demand had been steady over the past number of years with a large proportion of students coming from the Republic of Ireland. There were a small number of international students and the scope for growth in this regard was very much acknowledged.

Significant work had been undertaken over the last few years to develop a Northern Ireland Equine strategy which was fully supported by DAERA. The strategy placed a much greater value in the sector on knowledge and learning and would underpin the long-term viability and importance of the programmes. Many of the aspects within the strategy were reflected in the courses including internationalisation, an area which the College was already taking forward through its own international action plan.

#### 4.3 Staff Development

The Panel enquired how staff were supported and encouraged to undertake research and how scholarly activity informed curriculum and teaching. The Senior Team advised that although they were early in their journey in this regard, they were actively providing additional opportunities for staff to undertake Master's and PhD study. The Panel stated that it was important to encourage and develop staff to have the desire and capacity to be industry leaders and be prominent in the industry internationally both in relation to research output and attendance at conferences in the field. The Senior Team advised that the Equine Technologist role would be key in this regard going forward.

The Senior Team confirmed that Equine Technologists were involved in the assessment of students. They had participated fully in CPD and were involved in all aspects of course team activity.

Some staff had already gained HEA fellowship and all staff were encouraged to engage in order to achieve the expected levels of fellowship amongst staff within the College. The Course Team had also fully engaged with Ulster's Centre for Higher Education and Research Practice (CHERP) in preparation for revalidation.

The Senior Team advised that the platform that the College now had in terms of facilities, people and research and technology was very exciting for the future and that they would ensure to maximise all opportunities.

## 5 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a group of fourteen students from across both courses and all years. During discussions the following was noted:

### 5.1 Placement

Uptake of the placement year (DPP/DPP(I)) in the BSc Hons had been very low to date. Students were mainly of the view that they would not choose the optional placement as it would be too difficult to take a full year out of study and then return to final year. The courses already comprised considerable practical work and covered all aspects of the equine industry. Many students had part-time jobs in the industry and they felt that this was sufficient.

The college's Careers Day provided opportunities for students to network with employers and this was useful for summer employment and students were provided with support in relation to preparation of CVs and interview skills.

Students on the FdSc undertook a compulsory period of work-based learning and many were able to extend this over the summer period. This opened up a wide range of opportunities and support was provided throughout the whole process.

The Panel encouraged students not to dismiss the placement year, in particular international opportunities, or to underestimate the many benefits it would bring. They informed the group that students in other courses found it to be a transformative experience and would return to final year with an increased desire to succeed.

The FdSc students explained how placement was assessed and that they were also required to prepare a self-assessment portfolio.

The students confirmed that work based learning was generally unpaid or payment in kind but that this varied between employers. Students, however, could see the benefits that it provided in other ways through the development of personal and employability skills.

### 5.2 Assessment and Feedback

No students had any issue with the assessment load in either course and were content with the feedback provided. They were made aware of the assessment rubrics and what constituted the different grade bands. Staff were very approachable, and students were able to discuss draft assignments prior to submission.

### 5.3 Induction and Resources

Induction was both comprehensive and useful not only in year 1 but all years to introduce or re-introduce/re-inform students on a wide range of issues and support.

There were no issues in relation to learning resources or the availability of specialist texts in the library either in hard copy or e-book. The librarians were very helpful and lecturers also posted a large amount of material on the VLE or signposted students to particular sites.

Some students reported some difficulty in finding out how to access full academic journals rather than only abstracts and some additional sessions in this regard would be helpful.

#### 5.4 Why CAFRE?

The students were asked how they became aware of CAFRE and what had informed their decision to study on the Enniskillen campus. Responses included the following:

- Word of mouth and recommendation from other current and past students on a range of platforms including social media.
- The College's excellent reputation in the industry and the facilities on campus.
- The extensive practical aspects of the courses which set them apart from others – this was extremely important for the majority students.
- School careers days and open days on other CAFRE campuses.

#### 5.5 Articulation

In light of the proposal for a 2 + bridging + 1 model, the Panel discussed current articulation arrangements (2+2 model) with those who had progressed from the FdSc to year 2 of the BSc Hons. There had been some repetition in relation to business content but it was clear that the content overall in all subjects was more academically challenging. There was a real step up from the FdSc to the BSc Hons course and in the way the courses were delivered, the theoretical content and with a real emphasis on academic writing and referencing.

#### 5.6 Enhancements

All students spoke very positively about the college, the staff and the courses but were asked if there would be anything they would suggest could be done to enhance any aspects of the courses. Responses included:

- Additional hands-on laboratory work in both courses would be welcomed as this would really bring the theory and class-based material to life.
- Incorporation of technology earlier in the BSc Hons course.
- Use of a wider variety of horses for equitation e.g. cobs.
- More coverage of anatomy in year 1 to include more practical elements as this module was currently very theoretically focused.

#### 5.7 CAFRE Enniskillen campus

Having studied at the Enniskillen campus, students were asked to describe why a prospective student should study there. Responses included the following:

- The links with industry that were opened up as a CAFRE student and the opportunities to network and travel internationally.
- The high level of practical content.
- The level of insight provided into the horse as a whole.
- There were "no better staff" in terms of delivery and support and who also brought their wide-ranging industry experience to the courses which further enhanced course delivery, content and the whole student experience.
- The excellent facilities and resources.
- The ability to undertake a degree level course.
- The industry bursaries available to students clearly demonstrated the excellent reputation of the college and its students.

The Panel thanked the students for their engagement and enthusiasm – they were a very inspirational group and excellent ambassadors for the programmes. The Panel wished them well in their studies and future careers.

## 6 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

### 6.1 Revalidation

The Course Team set out how they had approached revalidation and the review of the curriculum. This had involved working closely with the Faculty Partnership Manager and other Ulster colleagues in relation to the new Integrated Curriculum Design framework and the new approaches to assessment and curriculum design. The review had been informed by feedback from a range of internal and external stakeholders, including current and former students and industry. The main areas of review related to assessment at different levels, the embedding of technology throughout, additional opportunities to develop interpersonal and employability skills and to incorporate international aspects of the industry which also brought with it international opportunities for students. The practical elements were retained as these were very much a USP and very attractive to prospective students.

### 6.2 Marketing

The Course Team advised the Panel that the courses were marketed by a central CAFRE marketing team alongside a specific team based at the Enniskillen campus. This activity was augmented amongst others through attendance at careers fairs, school visits and open days, campus open days, through social media, and links with college alumni. The college enjoyed a strong alumni network which was utilised for graduate profiles and the sharing of success stories. At Department level, marketing CAFRE courses was recognised as key and a priority area of CAFRE's marketing strategy was the use of social media.

The fact that equine brought with it many different employment opportunities in a wide range of fields, not least in business and management, was very strongly promoted to try and remove the perception that opportunities in the industry were limited. Staff worked hard in this regard and graduate profiles played a key role in assisting this.

### 6.3 Graduate employment and DPP/DPP(I)

In terms of graduate employment, the Team provided some examples of the internship opportunities both nationally and internationally and its links with industry. The Course Team recognised students' perception of taking a year out of study and that as a result uptake of the optional year placement had to date been very low. They fully acknowledged that placement was an invaluable and transformative opportunity and were taking positive steps to promote it more fully to the BSc Hons students with a view to increasing uptake. Industry was now also seeing the benefits and as a result were supporting more placements. Students who had undertaken the DPP(I) could be the best ambassadors in this regard.

In relation to paid or unpaid placements, the Course Team advised that this varied between employers and could be a challenge but the experience generally greatly outweighed formal payment. It was a delicate balance in ensuring that students were prepared well in advance and that they undertook a meaningful placement which suited their interests and developed their skills.

Robust and well-established quality assurance policies and procedures were in place at CAFRE in relation to all aspects of placement and placement providers. This included staff visits and regular communication between all parties.

The Team clarified that the placement supervisor was involved in assessment of the student but that this was on a pass/fail basis. A strategy was in place, however, to ensure that any issues were proactively addressed and support provided as required. Flexibility also existed that a student could be re-placed if the need arose.

#### 6.4 Attrition and student support

The Panel asked what steps were being taken to improve attrition rates and was advised that numbers appeared higher given the small numbers. The Course Team had already met with colleagues from Ulster's Quality Enhancement Department to address some of the coding issues. The Team was very strong in relation to the provision of all aspects of pastoral care and knew their students well but in recent times mental health issues had been at the forefront and the reason behind some students' withdrawal. They were aware of leave of absence and this would be used where appropriate. Some students, however, had since returned to the college.

The Team proactively provided support to students and specifically in relation to maths support, a subject which some students found challenging. Support was about breaking down barriers and contextualising the relevance of the numbers which in turn improved numeracy and students' understanding. It was suggested that peer support could be utilised and was advised that although it did not take place formally, it did already happen organically between the students.

#### 6.5 Assessment

The Panel noted the number of exams and the relatively low credit weighting for two hour exams with no difference between levels. The Team was of the view that exams were used at level 6 so it was important for students to have some experience in earlier years on how to prepare for and undertake this type of assessment. Exams also developed other skills including being able to work under pressure and to time. A number of the exams were undertaken online and others were more case study based.

The Panel encouraged the Team to reflect on its assessment strategy and how students were being assessed at each level. The Team stated that in doing so it was important that the reputation of the college be maintained in relation to the industry's understanding of the value of and skills developed in a degree level programme.

The nature of formative assessment was unclear in the document and the Panel asked the Team to explain what they did to allow very able students to go the extra mile and excel. The Team advised that this was about balance but that all students were aware of the assessment rubrics which would greatly assist in this regard. The students had spoken very positively about the rubrics and the Course Team noted that the development of these had been a very beneficial exercise as a teaching team and in relation to constructive alignment.

The scope and flexibility within many of the module assessments allowed students to pursue their own particular interests and the reflective elements and dissertation also provided opportunities for high flying students to further excel.

#### 6.6 BSc Hons and FdSc

The Panel asked the Team to set out what differentiated the two courses and was advised that the majority of students aspired to the BSc Hons but similarly others wanted the applied nature of the FdSc and from which they would progress directly to employment. The FdSc was very much a stand-alone qualification in its own right which led to employment as well as a route to the degree programme. It was noted that the FdSc was less recognised within industry compared to the former HND qualifications.

Discussion took place in relation to the potential of developing a HLA but the Team was of the view that this could be looked at in the future but for a number of reasons, including demand

and the current perception of apprenticeships in the industry, was not something that would be considered at this time.

#### 6.7 Mode of delivery

Both programmes were currently offered in full-time mode only. When asked why part-time was not an option, the Team advised that it had been offered in the past but had very low uptake due to, amongst other things, the nature of the industry. They were currently, however, developing a CertHE distance learning programme which would provide opportunities for those who were not able to study full-time or on-campus.

The Panel also suggested that consideration could be given to delivering stand-alone modules as an opportunity to refresh skills; or to incorporate event management into the business modules.

#### 6.8 Modules

The Panel noted the very good range of relevant modules and commended the range of assessment to develop a wide range of skills.

Some reading lists required review in terms of currency but it was also noted that some texts were relevant at every level. The Panel informed the Team that students requested additional information on how to access full journal articles.

The Panel stated that *Equine Anatomy and Physiology* lacked a practical element around for example, dissection which would greatly enhance the module (this was also an issue raised by students). The Team informed the Panel that part of its development plan included exactly this type of work to include the development of specialist facilities on site in this regard.

The Panel also noted the shortfall in relation to availability of nutrition laboratory spaces and that additional facilities were required in this area. This was also already part of the college's plans and would be developed over the next few years.

#### 6.9 Articulation

The new articulation proposal using a 2 + bridging + 1 model was discussed but it was the Panel's view that this required further work, including a full mapping exercise being undertaken, before it could be considered for approval.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the following:

- i) The excellent students, their professionalism and ability to articulate their views and engage with the panel;
- ii) The excellent links with industry and the ongoing efforts in relation to developing links internationally;
- iii) The pastoral support provided to students and approachable and available staff;
- iv) The Course Team's engagement with the Ulster Curriculum Design Principles and processes including the provision of assessment rubrics;
- v) The range and types of assessment;
- vi) The Course Team as a whole and their efforts to continually enhance the student experience;
- vii) The excellent facilities and resources available to support the provision.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the programmes be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2020/21 to 2024/25 inclusive) **with current articulation arrangements only (2+2 model)** subject to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel being addressed and a satisfactory response and a revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office **by 9 January 2020** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

### **Minimum and maximum intakes**

- 15 minimum and 25 maximum for both courses.

### **Conditions**

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed;

### **Recommendations**

- i) To reflect on how anatomy is delivered in the courses to bring a more practical focus and make the learning more accessible to the student (sections 5.6 and 6.8 refer);
- ii) To develop a Staff Development Plan with a strong emphasis on encouraging staff to undertake scholarly activity and specifically in relation to developing research activity, outputs and active collaborations (section 4.3 refers);
- iii) To continue to actively promote and encourage uptake of the DPP/DPP(I) in the BSc Hons Equine Management (sections 5.1 and 6.3 refer).

## 8 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Panel, in particular, the external member, and the Course Team for their valuable contribution to the revalidation process.

DT 25.11.19